

Washington State Patrol Media Release

Chief Lowell M. Porter



Office of the State Fire Marshal

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REDUCING HIGH RISKS OF SENIORS DYING IN FIRE

Chief Lowell M. Porter announced today that people ages 65 and older face a dramatically increased risk of dying in a home fire. The Office of the State Fire Marshal and the Washington State Association of Fire Marshal's has teamed with the U.S. Fire Administration in a campaign to raise awareness about the increase risk of fire death for adults 65 and older, and to advise those 50 and older of the risks as they plan ahead and care for older loved ones. The campaign's messages include safe disposal of cigarettes, cooking with care and cautious use of heaters.

In Washington State, between 1999 and 2003, 290 fire fatalities were reported to the State Fire Marshal, of those deaths reported, 84 (or 29%) were adults over the age of 65. In Washington the leading causes of the fire deaths in adults 65 and over are smoking, home heating and cooking - shadowing the national trend.

With the older population larger than ever and still growing, it's important that we take steps to reduce this public health problem. This campaign is about alerting people to the risk and letting them know how to reduce it. Many of these deaths could have been prevented with safe practices:

Before you light your next cigarette, remember:

- Put your cigarette or cigar out at the first sign of feeling drowsy while watching television or reading.
- Use deep ashtrays and put your cigarette all the way out.
- Never smoke in bed.
- Don't walk away from lit cigarettes and other smoking materials.
- Don't put ashtrays on the arms of sofas or chairs.

Whether you are cooking the family holiday dinner or a snack for the grandchildren:

- Never leave cooking unattended
- Always wear short or tight-fitting sleeves when you cook. Keep towels, pot holders and curtains away from flames.
- Never use the range or oven to heat your home.
- Double-check the kitchen before you go to bed or leave the house.

Before you grab a good book and cozy up, make sure you do the following:

- Space heaters need space. Keep flammable materials at least three feet away from heaters.
- When buying a space heater, look for a control feature that automatically shuts off the power if the heater falls over.
- Keep fire in the fireplace by making sure you have a screen large enough to catch flying sparks and rolling logs.

A Fire Safety Campaign for People 50-Plus developed by the U.S. Fire Administration, includes a fire safety fact sheet for people ages 50 and older. Printed public service announcements in English and Spanish, bookmarks in English and Spanish, and a campaign guide for fire service officials. The fact sheet and campaign fliers are available on the campaign Web site, www.usfa.gov/50Plus. A data report on the fire death rates of people ages 50 and older, consumer-friendly sections around campaign messages and a media section are also posted on the site. Materials can be requested via the Web site.

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is a Bureau of the Washington State Patrol, providing fire and life safety services to the citizens of Washington State including inspections of state licensed facilities, plan review of fire protection systems and school construction projects, licensing of fire sprinkler contractors and pyrotechnic operators, training Washington State's firefighters, and collecting emergency response data. For additional information you may visit our web page at www.wsp.wa.gov and then click on State Fire Marshal.

For more information on fire prevention, please contact your local fire department, or the Office of the State Fire Marshal at (360) 753-0400.

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